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GENERAL PLAN FOR A COURSE IN ECONOMICS

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During the school year 1920-21 the writer found himself confronted with the task of devising a general plan for a half-year course in economics for a particular high school in a rural community. The writer was tolerably familiar with the people and their activities. The method used was to list the important activities of an economic type and determine the aims and content of the course in terms of this list.

These activities may be considered as of two types: (1) those activities common to all people and (2) those of especial importance in the community considered. These, of course, will overlap, and it may be sufficient to select only those of especial significance in the community considered, because these will inevitably contain many of the activities of the other group.

The community considered is approximately one rural township composing a rural, centralized school district. It contains two small villages and adjoins the limits of a city of 12,000 people. The chief vocation is, of course, agriculture. The following phases are important: breeding of horses and hogs; producing apples and staple grains like wheat, oats, and corn.

The people must provide for the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. As a governmental unit, they must levy and pay taxes, construct roads, maintain schools, support poor relief and widows' pensions, and pay salaries of various public servants. As an advanced civilized group which seeks protection from disasters they must and do use various forms of insurance—fire, tornado, automobile, and life, the latter being used least. As in most rural communities, the people are seasonal employers of labor and find it difficult to secure this service. This has led to the keeping of a hired man and his family the whole year on some large farms. They purchase various kinds of machinery for use on the farm and

in the home. Almost every home has a telephone for which a fixed monthly rental is paid. Probably two-thirds of the families have an automobile. A few have their own electric light plants. The governmental unit is in debt for roads and for a modern school building. A fair proportion of the young people remain in the community and thus finance their start in life there. Others, who leave the community, often finance their start in life by aid of the home community. Markets are now entering a new stage. Co-operative farmers' organizations are rapidly taking over the handling of grains and feeds and also acting as sales agents for machinery, feeds, and some other articles.

The following economic problems suggest themselves as being important in the experience of these people. All of them suggest the desirability of studying some of the fundamental conceptions of economics, such as consumption, production, exchange, and distribution.

1. Money
2. Labor
3. Thrift
4. Financing the start in life (rent, interest)
5. Financing new projects (interest, bonds)
6. Budget-making
7. Taxation
8. Public improvements
9. The financial support of schools
10. Churches and benevolent enterprises
11. Economic co-operative enterprises (marketing, buying)
12. Insurance
13. Banks
14. Railroad transportation
15. Periods of falling prices

Before proceeding farther in considering the content of the course, it is proper to raise the question, "What are the objectives of such a course?" First, what are the sociological aims? Second, what are the psychological aims? Using Small's classification of human needs (interests), we find that economic interests are common to all. Primarily, then, this study should assist in *satisfying* economic needs and *contributing to efficiency* in satisfying economic needs.

These needs are judged to be as follows: (1) to be efficient agricultural producers and distributors; (2) to be efficient consumers; (3) to protect the economic resources. The people must work intelligently and efficiently, save consistently, use money judiciously, plan systematically for income and expenditure, keep records, protect themselves by means of insurance, use banks, have an understanding of the nature of periods of inflation and depression, and be able to make some adjustments to such conditions. The young men and women need to understand the value of, and the methods of planning, the "start in life." The use of labor-saving machinery in the house and on the farm should be understood. Occasionally, a new economic project is started; for example, a new farm purchased. The principles and practices of mortgage transactions, loans, and indebtedness should be understood. The farm loan banking system must be understood.

As a member of a group, the citizen will be called upon to vote and pay taxes, to assist in making public improvements, and to contribute to religious and benevolent enterprises. Because of the development of marketing on a co-operative basis, he will find it to advantage to be able to participate intelligently in this community activity. How to secure labor when work requiring additional help is seasonal is a problem for the farmer with the moderate-sized farm. As a citizen of the larger community, he must be intelligent concerning problems of national taxation, railway transportation, etc. As a parent, he must train the child in the proper use of money and help him to choose a suitable vocation. Likewise, the child must be taught to do all sorts of farm work. These are some of the more pressing economic needs, and, hence, we may call them the sociological objectives.

The types of psychological objectives can now be indicated readily. First, such a study should help in securing information concerning economic conditions and the principles involved in solving the problems that arise therefrom. This type of psychological objective will probably be foremost. Second, it is necessary to develop some economic *habits* and *ideals*. Thrift should be both a habit and an ideal. Methods of purchasing are partly habits. Conservation should be an ideal. Third, it is very necessary that

boys and girls have some efficiency in thinking in regard to economic conditions. Whatever else might be possible of attainment, at least these objectives should be striven for: getting information, forming habits and ideals, acquiring skill in thinking in terms of economic situations.

What then shall be the content of such a course? First, information which is obviously related to economic needs. Second, exercises which are real problems in economics for the pupils. Third, some material which will make a strong appeal to easily aroused motives.

The sequence of the content is also a problem to be considered. In recognition of the principle of apperception, it is urged that a practical discussion of the immediate economic problems precede the limited study of economic theory. Second, the material must be so arranged that the increasing complexity is gradual. Third, material must reappear so that review is assured.

The types of teaching methods likely to be serviceable are those directly related to the psychological aims: drill, review, recitation-lesson, problem-solving, supervised study, a limited amount of lecturing (telling, exposition), and a few projects. With the time limit of five hours per week for one semester for high-school students, it will probably be difficult to use many projects; but a few should surely be included.

A SUGGESTED SEQUENCE OF MAJOR TOPICS

- I. Production. A study of limited problems involved
 1. Meaning
 - a) Explanation
 - b) Illustration
 2. Factors involved viewed in light of rural conditions
 - a) Nature
 - b) Labor
 - c) Capital
 - d) Management

Production is suggested as the first major problem for study because it is judged to be the easiest to use from the standpoint of apperception. Rural people use almost all of their wakeful hours in labor designed to be productive.

In connection with the study of production, it will be well to use material concerning the factors of production taken from such a book as *The Principles of Rural Economics* by Carver.¹ For problem work, *Outlines of Economics Developed in a Series of Problems*² by Marshall, Wright, and Field will be a source. However, the teacher will find that the most serviceable problems are those which she can lead the pupils to introduce. The next in value are those which she proposes.

II. Exchange

1. a) Explanation
b) Illustration
2. Value
3. Money
4. Markets
5. Credits
6. Banks and banking
7. Thrift

The study of exchange is taken up next because the activities involved seem to occupy second place in the economic interests of rural people. In this connection it is necessary to study co-operative marketing and buying, using material from some such writings as Powell's *Cooperation in Agriculture*,³ or other similar writings. In connection with credits, banking, and thrift, the problems of financing the start in life, financing new projects, federal farm loans, and financial depressions are to be studied. Some practical scheme of thrift should be inaugurated at the instance of the pupils, if possible. The same suggestions concerning problems hold here as with the study of production.

III. Distribution of economic products

1. Meaning
 - a) Explanation
 - b) Illustration
2. Factors sharing in products (goods)
 - a) Rent
 - b) Wages
 - c) Interest
 - d) Profits

¹ Boston: Ginn & Co.

² Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³ New York: Macmillan Co.

The study of distribution is placed third in the sequence because it is needed to clarify further problems arising in the study of production and exchange. Problem work will be very necessary in this study to establish the attitude of considering all four factors in economic distribution.

IV. Consumption

1. Human wants
 - a) Types
 - b) Cultivated desires
2. Utility and goods
3. Demand
4. Wise and unwise consumption
5. Consumers' leagues

V. Public economic activities

1. Taxation
2. Public improvements
3. Governmental expenditures
4. Governmental control of business and industry

VI. Selected topics or problems for special study

1. The economic status of Bolshevism
2. The economic basis of Socialism
3. Conservation of nation's resources
4. Study of problems involved in railways
5. Economic conditions of telegraph, telephone, and cable systems
6. The stock exchange of any one city
7. Study of any one large monopoly corporation
8. Economic functions of middlemen
9. Advertising in a single small city or community
10. Tax rates of a single county
11. Special phases of the labor problem

As to distribution of time, it is suggested that the approximate time allotment be as follows:

Topic	Number of Weeks
I. Production.....	2
II. Exchange.....	4
III. Distribution.....	2
IV. Consumption.....	2
V. Public economic activities.....	4
VI. Special problems.....	4
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